

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM:  
ESSENTIAL CONTEXT FOR NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT**

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## ABSTRACT

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The current *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* is not, as stated, a comprehensive representation of “unique American internationalism”. However, there are key components of American national character, that give rise to the notion of “American exceptionalism”, which are evident when one examines American historical political thought. Four threads of entrenched American character emerge: a belief in the *ethical importance of American elements of national power as means and ends in themselves*; a belief in the *universal applicability of liberal values and institutions to mankind*; a belief in the *ethic of reciprocity as a normative means to achieve positive interactions among nations*; and a belief in the *value of maintaining strategic flexibility in an increasingly complex strategic environment*. These ethical and value-based tenets are constants which historically influenced U.S. international behavior through the medium of four international relations theories: classical realism, classical liberalism, isolationism, and idealism. Examination of the contemporary international environment reveals a disconnection between U.S. values and traditions and current strategies. I shall argue that the four tenants identified above should form a foundation for current and future U.S. strategy development and should therefore be included in the U.S. Army War College Strategy Formulation Model.



## AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM: ESSENTIAL CONTEXT FOR NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

The current *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* states that “The U.S. national security strategy will be based on a *distinctly American internationalism* (italics mine) that reflects the union of our values and our national interests.”<sup>1</sup> But is the current strategic direction of the United States truly in sync with the degree, scope, and desire to which the U.S. is willing to commit to and influence the international environment? Some informed commentators think not. Rather, the operating thesis presented here is that the current National Security Strategy of 2002 (NSS), the document that guides the development of U.S. foreign policy and grand strategy, is incomplete as a basis for America’s policy formulation. Although correctly recognizing the imperative of strategy development within the context of American values and traditions, the NSS is rooted in the flawed assumption that there is traditional American support for interventionism on a grand scale, advanced primarily through the application of the military element of national power. It is the contention of this paper that key to successful American foreign policy formulation is the construction of a sound framework for the execution of strategy that rests upon a more nuanced understanding of the foundation of traditional American perspectives, values, and ethics.

Unfortunately, the inadequacies of the NSS have already led to strategic miss-steps including: the alienation of allies like Germany, France, and Spain; the weakening of friends like Great Britain; and the empowerment of adversaries like Iran, Syria, and North Korea. International and domestic commentators who may have thought they understood U.S. national character, foreign policy, and strategy are asking many hard questions. Do the American people support regime change to create democracies? If so, how will this be funded and sustained? How will America remain consistent to such a strategy? How has the U.S. traditionally advocated democracy abroad? What are the realistic estimates for success when forcibly creating democracies? Do newly emerging democracies create more regional stability, or are they just as prone to tyranny as other political systems?

Attempting to answer these huge questions in detail is largely outside the scope of this paper. Rather, the purpose here is to more narrowly examine several bold assumptions asserted by the current NSS, and to present a framework that may assist in underpinning American grand strategy. The NSS assumes, for instance, that Americans will support forcible regime change to create democracies. It assumes as well that democracies, including emerging democracies, are inherently more stable than other forms of government. These assumptions currently guide U.S. strategic direction. If the U.S. is to chart its strategic course in

the coming years based on these assumptions it is prudent and necessary to revisit and assess their validity now, three and a half years after they were proposed. A means to accomplish this is through examination of the unique character of the American polity in relation to the international environment. The distinctly American internationalism of which the NSS speaks does exist, but it is not expressed within the context of the NSS as currently written. The theoretical context of the current NSS is quite narrowly based on a combination of selected elements of classical realism and classical liberalism, but these do not in themselves create a basis for strategy and policy development that is sufficiently representative of traditional American diplomacy.

Theories of international relations are attempts to capture, categorize, and explain the behavior of international actors. Foreign policy and strategy is crafted by drawing on theory to achieve long-term goals. The strategic theorist Colin Gray has commented extensively on the nexus between theory and the application of strategy. He correctly observes; "Strategic ideas and theory must define, organize, and explain for the practical world wherein threats or deeds have strategic consequences."<sup>2</sup> All national leaders work within this context. They subscribe to a particular IR worldview (theory) which they then transform into policy (practice) in the international arena. Simple put, theories of international relations (IR) are broadly used by policymakers as the conceptual framework to determine conduct between nations. Decisions as heady as whether or not to go to war, or as mundane as whether or not to raise a tariff, are generally governed by an administration's degree of adherence to a particular IR *theory-in-practice* (TIP). Bernard Brodie noted that strategy is "nothing if not pragmatic....Above all, strategic theory is a theory for action."<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, in America's political realm the casual observer can, at will, view images, hear sound-bites, and see real-time action clips of national leaders executing IR TIP. Throughout U.S. history that has meant observing a shifting national security strategy, based on the relative influence of one of four broad traditional IR theories: classical realism, classical liberalism, isolationism, and idealism (also known as utopianism or internationalism). The term "idealism" was coined by historian and international relations theorist Edward Hallett Carr as an epithet to describe the foreign policy orientation of President Woodrow Wilson, as well as several other international leaders after World War I. Carr made the case for "realist" policy approaches by demonstrating, as he saw them, the weaknesses and fallacies of idealism. Broadly defined, idealism is "an approach to international relations that stresses the importance of moral values, legal norms, internationalism and harmony of interests as guides to foreign policy-making...a focus on institution building... (and) favoring a mixed-actor model which includes international

organizations, transnational organizations, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), MNCs (multi-national corporations), and other non-state players" as central to modern interactions between nations.<sup>4</sup> Isolationism—like idealism a term that carries much negative baggage—implies little involvement with the community of nations. Isolationism in this sense is more of a conceptual and hypothetical construct as opposed to an IR TIP. Neo-isolationism, the more practicable off-shoot of isolationist thinking which has at times dominated U.S. foreign policy strategy, is defined more broadly as "a broad spectrum of aspirations, assumptions and attitudes" which "suggest that permanence is a vice and flexibility a virtue" and that "America's engagement with the world outside its own hemisphere should be selective and dictated by national priorities above all else".<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, classical realism and classical liberalism require definition within the context of this paper. Classical realism, broadly defined, is the belief that a state or nation-state is the principal self-interested actor in international politics and "its central proposition is that since the purpose of statecraft is national survival in a hostile environment the acquisition of power is the proper, rational and inevitable goal of foreign policy. International politics, indeed, all politics, is thus defined as a 'struggle for power'. 'Power' in this sense is conceptualized as both a means and an end in itself."<sup>6</sup> Rooted in the Hobbesian (pessimistic) view of human nature, the state is a necessary creation to protect individuals from an inherently anarchic world and the worst impulses manifested by human beings. Classical liberalism is similarly broadly defined as "an ideology, or current of political thought, which strives to maximize liberty, i.e. freedom of thought for individuals, limitations on the powers of government and religion, the rule of law...and fundamental human rights...to include the right to life, liberty, and property."<sup>7</sup> In this construct, the state is held as the medium through which "natural rights" of an individual are attained, the most fundamental of which are personal liberty and equality.

Many view these four intellectual traditions as competing for influence among U.S. national security leaders, decision makers, and policymakers. It is true that there have always been tension and distance between these intellectual camps. Professors Glen Snyder and Paul Diesing sum this up well: "Some theorists take up permanent residence on one (theoretical) island or other, others continue to shuttle, but few attempt to build bridges, perhaps because the islands seem too far apart."<sup>8</sup> In point of fact, however, most IR TIP have historically been combination theories, or approaches that combined selected aspects of two or more of the aforementioned theories. Theories such as neo-realism, neo-liberalism, and neo-Marxism are but a few examples. Each of these approaches may achieve varying degrees of success under different circumstances, but they are typically too narrow or too broad, too absolute or too

general. A more careful examination reveals that the main ideas underpinning each traditional theory reflect seminal aspects of American national character which have contributed in fundamental ways toward U.S. foreign policy and national security strategy development. Moreover, it is possible to distill and utilize these elements and by doing so the U.S. might develop national security strategy goals and objectives that are more balanced, bipartisan, and ultimately successful.

Political analyst James Mann outlines a compelling intellectual history of the synthesis of key elements of classical realism and classical liberalism into the latest selective combination theory, the so-called “neo-conservative” movement. His book, *Rise of the Vulcans: the History of Bush’s War Cabinet* provides a concise and accurate description of the negative reaction of certain groups against the social liberation movement of the 1960’s and displeasure in what they perceived as slow moving anti-communist containment policies.<sup>9</sup> Political philosopher Francis Fukuyama has also written in detail lately about the early history of the group. He traces its intellectual roots to a small group that included Irving Kristal, Irving Howe, Daniel Bell, and Nathan Glazier, among others, in the late 1930’s and early 1940’s. He maintains that the diversity of thought which coalesced into neo-conservativism resulted in a belief system that shared four common principles: a belief in the moral authority of American application of power, a belief in the universality of human liberty, and skepticism of international organizations and social engineering executed on a grand scale by big government.<sup>10</sup> Further, he believes that practitioners in the current administration have fundamentally altered the original meaning of neo-conservatism by placing the principle of moral power above all other tenants, especially skepticism of grand social engineering experiments. In other words, the principles and theoretical roots of neo-conservatism have been overshadowed by a belief in the “transformational” potential of American military power.<sup>11</sup>

The late Leo Strauss, a University of Chicago political philosopher/scientist/historian, is also widely regarded as having at least a modicum of influence on the development of the neo-conservative movement. Strauss published dozens of writings analyzing political thought from antiquity to modern times. Many works were devoted to favorable interpretations of Plato’s writings, praising the ideal of a benevolent Philosopher-King who rules autocratically for the greater good of the *demos*.<sup>12</sup> It is in the rational self-interest of the state (classical realism), Strauss might have maintained, for the ruling elite to advance “Noble Lies” (Plato used the term “Noble Lies” to broadly describe the desired advocacy role of a wise Philosopher-King) to advance the collective security and liberty of the populace (classical liberalism).<sup>13</sup> As such, the transformational nature of American power coupled with the imperative of advancing the cause

of liberty overshadow all else. Explained in this manner the neo-conservative's unique theoretical combination of realism and liberalism is not hard to reconcile intellectually. The result is a horizontal sharing of fundamental principles across macro-level international relations disciplines—classical realism and classical liberalism—that arrives at what might be termed pragmatic neo-conservatism. Fukuyama does not see this connection in the same way; he sees pragmatic neo-conservatism as a stand-alone theory which stresses the application of military power above all else, which is in an “uneasy alliance with Jacksonian conservatives”, alternatively termed nationalist, in the execution of U.S. foreign policy, especially in Iraq.<sup>14</sup> This is another way of looking at this complex grouping of ideas that has merit and validity. The goal for all inquiry into this subject is, as Fukuyama states, to seek “new ideas, neither neoconservative nor realist, for how America is to relate to the rest of the world—ideas that retain the neoconservative belief in the universality of human rights, but without its illusions about the efficacy of American power and hegemony to bring these ends about.”<sup>15</sup> Regardless the means one uses, developing an understanding of these connections is essential to distinguish the pragmatic neo-conservative thought process that currently drives U.S. national security strategy.

Neo-conservative thought gained momentum after the Cold War as the U.S. sought to define its role as the sole superpower. This is not surprising since it is an appealing theory on many levels. The U.S. was culturally, economically, and militarily at the peak of power; indeed, it was the most powerful nation in all respects that has existed to this point in history. A confluence of events since the end of the Cold War provided the best possible moment in time for the U.S. to launch an ideological, cultural, and military campaign if so desired. Without any real military peer on the horizon to intervene there were no barriers to virtual unilateral action. From a neo-conservative-realist orientation a historic opportunity was provided: to seize a competitive edge, to endure present instability and war to ensure the sovereignty and security of future generations, and to lead the U.S. electorate to this end state for their own good. The view from a neo-conservative-liberal orientation likewise provided attractive possibilities: an opportunity to advance the cause of universal human liberty, to promote the spread of democratic values and institutions, and to lead the world population a step closer to the Kantian ideal of perpetual peace, underwritten and guaranteed by democratic states. At the risk of giving this subject short shrift, the union of these two sets of beliefs and motivations is popularly perceived as neo-conservatism-in-a-nutshell. Most political commentators today would agree that a relatively small group of neo-conservative-oriented political and academic elites who shared most, if not all, of the beliefs and inclinations noted above (variously termed by political

commentators and scholars as liberal internationalists, democratic realists, assertive unilateralists, or liberal interventionists) have consistently led the NSS policy formulation process since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

The combination of these two theories into a single pragmatic theory for the formulation of the NSS represents a paradox to many American observers. Others see no paradox or contradiction, asserting that the importance of ensuring the natural rights of all humans justifies, at times, the application of power against other states. Still other Americans, both informed and uninformed in matters of strategy, do not see the theoretical connections that are outlined above. Many Americans simply and understandably view all politics through the contemporary lens of Democrat and Republican Party politics. Some view the political world through ideology-laden groups labeled variously as conservative, liberal, libertarian, or independent. Many Americans exhibit an affinity for an uncomplicated and straightforward nationalism or populism. The central point here is that there are many perspectives from which to view international interactions and the language for expressing viewpoints in international relations often times becomes confused, vague, contrapuntal, and paradoxical. Americans, it seems, are perhaps more at ease in such an environment than other national populations. The job of the national-level U.S. strategist in the future is therefore understandably complex: synthesizing a strategy development approach that is representative of American values, ethics, and ideology requires an in-depth appreciation of American national character. Does such an understanding and appreciation currently exist? Does the current NSS support attainment of U.S. national interests and are the methods of implementation acceptable to the American public?

To begin to answer these questions we must acknowledge that neither classical realism nor classical liberalism are fully equipped to assist in meeting the strategic challenges of the future. This is not to imply that the use of international relations theory is not advisable. On the contrary, as has been shown, the use of theoretical constructs, especially classical realism and classical liberalism, helps to clarify and explain elements of political behavior and provides a context for development and application of strategy. Classical realism and classical liberalism have a long and respected tradition in American political culture as well as in many other countries. Even the famous critic of idealism, E. H. Carr acknowledged that "sound political theories contain elements of utopianism and realism, of power and of moral values."<sup>16</sup> Fukuyama has similarly acknowledged that it would be a "feckless" task to attempt to regain the original meaning of the neo-conservative construct and has therefore argued that what is needed is a "Realistic Wilsonianism".<sup>17</sup> The point here is that both of these theories are important, but neither theory can, on its own, totally account for or encompass all of the rich and

often paradoxical American political traditions which are necessary to inform and guide American national security strategy development. To allow policy to go awry through bureaucratic complacency or miss-directed national pride in the *status quo* is a cardinal mistake for any government.

#### American Exceptionalism: A Review

One might ask why it is critically important for America to draw on its IR traditions for foreign policy and strategy development. The reason is straightforward; the nature of the American one-of-a-kind civil society and polity mandate use of traditions as essential toward creating sustainable policy at all levels. America's status as a singularly unique country bound by intellectual, cultural, and political traditions are what shape and provide context to actions internationally. Indeed, all nations are unique in that they are bound together by a broad rubric of traditions and beliefs which constitute their national "culture". Wrongly labeled by some as simply American "hubris", America's status as the only superpower nation gives weight to every action or inaction that the U.S. undertakes on the international stage. If for no other reason, the incredible influence asserted through U.S. behavior on the international environment demands an understanding of American national character and American political propensities. Lacking this context individual Americans tend not to see compelling interests at home or abroad. History has shown that when policy is developed that does not factor in American values, traditions, and beliefs, faulty assumptions are made which oftentimes produce disastrous outcomes. The point here, however, is not necessarily to critique past policies, but to point out the importance of understanding the unique position of the U.S. in the world as it relates to policy formulation in the future.

To this end, it is instructive to briefly examine the basis for what might broadly be termed the components of the "American character". This topic has been the thesis for literally thousands of works and has been the subject of classroom study from secondary schools to graduate schools. Many have impugned the term "exceptionalism" as overly ethnocentric and lending itself to use in the formulation of nationalist or fascist policy. When discussing Nazis Germany or Fascist Italy, this would be a correct categorization of meaning. To the contrary, in the American context, the phrase "American exceptionalism" has a unique pedigree in association with American history that deserves explanation and understanding. Here it will suffice to outline some of the themes that resonate and give clarity to what Alexis de Tocqueville termed American "exceptionalism".<sup>18</sup>

Siobhan McEvoy-Levy provides an in-depth and compelling history of the influence of the idea of American exceptionalism in her book, *American Exceptionalism and U.S. Foreign Policy*. In it, she notes the incipience of the notion of exceptionalism with the arrival of the Puritans. “In 1630, Massachusetts Bay Colony Governor John Winthrop described the Puritan mission to be a moral beacon for the world: ‘For wee must Consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eies of all people are upon us’.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, McEvoy-Levy argues that the idea of American exceptionalism has become a “‘para-ideological’ umbrella beneath which extend such related concepts and phrases as ‘manifest destiny’, ‘city on a hill’, ‘American dream’, and ‘new world order’.”<sup>20</sup>

Geographically removed from the stifling traditions and influence of European powers, America succeeded in winning independence and founding a government which was rooted in classical liberal values and ethics. Thomas Paine’s sentiments published in *Common Sense* in 1776 were indicative of the feelings of most colonists at the time; “we have it within our power to begin the world all over again.”<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Concord Hymn*, from which the inscription on the Obelisk at Concord were drawn, implies not just a belief in sacrifice for national independence but a belief in the wider significance of American liberal values for the world at large:

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,  
Their flag to April’s breeze unfurled;  
Here once the embattled farmers stood;  
And fired the shot heard round the world.

Americans still tend to feel this way. For Americans, there has always been a sense that the “American experiment” has broader applicability to the world and that standard approaches to international relationships have never been fully appropriate.

What, specifically, then are the component parts of the American “para-ideology” that inform current policy making? Again the field is brimming with articles and books relating to this subject. Seymour Martin Lipset lists what he considers the value-set that drives our national attitudes: egalitarianism, individualism, populism, a laissez-faire economic orientation, and freedom.<sup>22</sup>

An alternate list, or at least a supplementary list, might include: democratic institutions (to which Alexis de Tocqueville devotes the early chapters of his noted book), a reverence for the American founding fathers of the republic that borders on religion or mythology, tolerance of ethnic diversity, and an uncanny ability to rationalize (or ignore) paradox.<sup>23</sup> Americans cherish the separation of powers established in the Constitution of the United States which divides but does not dilute or diminish the power of the nation. The example of President and General

George Washington, who voluntarily transitioned executive power, created a democratic legacy that resonates with every American school child today. Ethnic diversity, notwithstanding the debate that has always raged over specific immigration policies, is considered a central source of cultural strength by the American public. Americans, as many observers have noted, likewise have a predisposition for rationalizing paradox. John Steinbeck once said: "We are able to believe that our government is weak, stupid, overbearing, dishonest, and inefficient, and at the same time we are convinced that it is the best government in the world, and we would like to impose it upon everyone else. We talk about the American Way of Life as though it involved the ground rules for the governance of heaven."<sup>24</sup> At once detached and committed, Americans are unique in these respects and within this context because we *feel* we are unique, a new people *creatio ex nihilo*, bound together by beliefs derived from uniquely shared cultural traditions.

Above all, the thread of four themes runs through what the late psychiatrist Carl Jung, would have called the "collective subconscious" of American society. The first is a belief in the *ethical quality of American power*, all facets of national power, as a means and an end in itself. Americans believe strongly that their power, American power, is different than power manifested by non-democratic nations. There is a belief, right or wrong, that American power is an absolute good, since it champions the cause of liberal values that are applicable to all men and all nations. The second is the belief that *liberty is a transcendent value*: human freedom and the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and property (and perhaps the pursuit of happiness) are universal and should be the focus of representative and responsible government. American government is held as the bastion of modern liberal institutions with an almost sacrosanct responsibility to preserve the faith and proselytize the message. The third is a belief in the *ethic of reciprocity as a basic principle of conduct*, not only among individual neighbors, but in the international community as well. Americans believe in international cooperation, collective security, alliances among friends and against enemies, charity to the poor and defense of the weak. Lastly, Americans *value flexibility in thought and action* as essential toward maintaining the unique paradox in attitudes and beliefs that typify American cultural, economic, social, and political interaction. Indeed, this may be the most fundamental value that holds all others in place. Americans, Steinbeck might have said, sense the power of the liberal message and understand that they have the necessary elements of national power to project that message—but they reserve the right to commit the nation to any one course of action relative to all other factors in the international environment.

These ethics and values which are the core of the "American character" are each represented in IR traditions which the U.S. has followed to one degree or another at different

times in history. Classical realism in this context stresses the affinity for the ethic of “benevolent” power—power is the means by which a nation advances and achieves national interests and ensures continued sovereignty. Classical liberalism has provided the hallmark theory for expressing a national missionary zeal for expanding the influence of liberal values and institutions. Idealism has championed the value of reciprocity among nations on the international scene; it argues that reciprocity and international institutions and relationships can go far in serving the interests of all nations. However much academics and politicians currently express distaste for the term, neo-isolationist currents are deeply entrenched in the American desire to remain flexible and to maintain a functional paradox of simultaneous involvement and detachment. Neo-conservative thought processes, as discussed earlier, acknowledges the ethical quality of American power and accounts for the value of liberty writ-large which are associated with classical realism and classical liberalism, respectively. They do not, however, address the other essential elements of American character necessary for policy success. Americans expect each of these components to be reflected in national policies especially beyond U.S. borders. As the polls show, Americans sense something is amiss in U.S. foreign policy.<sup>25</sup> Unless American foreign policy and strategy include the idealist ethic of reciprocity and the neo-isolationist value of flexibility, American support for the current strategic direction is likely to deteriorate.

#### American Exceptionalism in American Diplomatic History: A Review

The idea that America has a unique national character as it relates to IR TIP is not original.<sup>26</sup> National policymakers of the past have used the theoretical approaches mentioned to construct frameworks for policies and strategies that they believed were reflective of American desires, and in-step with cultural and historical traditions. As discussed earlier, most of the time these theories were not employed as rigid “stand alone” doctrines, but were pragmatic combination approaches—that is, approaches that sought to combine two or more of the four prominent theoretical traditions to one extent or another. This being the case it is widely recognized that some degree of combination is a must for successful strategy development. However, the specific ethical and value-based themes as outlined in the last section have not, as yet, been merged to form a basis for “distinctly American internationalism” through the medium of IR theory.<sup>27</sup> Colin Gray has discussed unified strategic theory but in a slightly different sense. Discussing the unification the strategic elements of power, such as battlefield operating systems, seems more the focus of his work on the subject.<sup>28</sup>

It is informative to examine the extent to which each of these elements of our national character has been represented in U.S. international political history. The goal in this respect is to contextualize ethical and value-based considerations for use in the future as policy development tools by identifying their linkage to past IR TIP. The ethical and value-based principles of power, liberty, reciprocity, and flexibility conceptualized as mutually supporting elements of U.S. national character and not mutually exclusive, may then be used to assist in the process of developing sustainable and supportable policy in the current strategic environment.

During the first century of U.S. nationhood, the modest application of national power abroad was the norm. The parting words of George Washington in his farewell address, “steer clear of permanent alliances”, held great resonance and aptly expressed American attitudes. Likewise, Thomas Jefferson reinforced and echoed this sentiment in his 1801 inaugural, advising future generations to avoid “entangling alliances”. Americans wished to avoid the constant, destructive wars of Europe. The geographic distance which separated the U.S. from other major powers allowed the luxury of isolation. American isolationism was thus given expression as executive guidance. Because of this leaders were able to focus resources toward domestic policies such as Manifest Destiny and were inclined to assert unilateral declarations such as the Monroe Doctrine, which was designed to discourage European imperialism in the Western hemisphere.<sup>29</sup> American leaders recognized the advantages conferred by an isolationist approach for a small and developing nation: *strategic flexibility*. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. has commented extensively on the historical imperative of the fledgling U.S. to remain as detached as possible from European power struggles and international intrigue. He has gone so far as to state that, “isolationism may well be America’s natural state, an attitude from which we are moved only by direct and palpable threats to our national security and to which we gratefully return when such threats fade away.”<sup>30</sup> Although untenable as a basis in itself for strategic policy formulation since the beginning of World War II, aspects of isolationism are intuitively pleasing to the American psyche, allow for strategic flexibility, and are thus still critical to consider when planning strategy.

Modern neo-isolationist thinking is simply a desire for maintaining and protecting American strategic flexibility in the current domestic/international environment. There are still those who hold a “pure” isolationist point of view, as some claim of Pat Buchanan, advocating what most would term unsupportable and undesirable “nativist” policies. But to discount the theory entirely will lead the American policymaker equally to unsustainable and incomplete solutions. The neglected concept of “inter mestism”, a term coined by Bayless Manning, a

former President of the Council on Foreign Relations, is very interesting and deserves to become a key component of neo-isolationist thinking as the idea becomes more widely known in academic and policy circles. Intermestism is the recognition that all international concerns have tremendous domestic implications. Manning coined the term in a 1977 Foreign Affairs article, "The Congress, the Executive, and Intermestic Affairs: Three Proposals".<sup>31</sup> In this prescient article Manning outlined the connections of international policy to domestic public interests and proposed the creation of a joint Congressional committee, the Joint Committee on International and Domestic Affairs, as a forum for strategic policy formulation. This idea has even more applicability today than it did in 1977 as globalization issues have expanded exponentially since Manning's article. In the wake of financial catastrophes such as Hurricane Katrina, attacks on U.S. soil and concomitant establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, the broader role (as yet undefined) of the U.S. Department of Defense in civil defense, the controversy over a foreign company managing our ports, and the possibility of conflicts vital to U.S. national interest in other parts of the world, the central tenet of strategic flexibility will take on more importance. As a result of the addition of intermestic considerations into the neo-isolationist construct, cost-benefit and opportunity-cost analysis can be systematically applied to ensure against over-commitment of national resources in strategically unsupportable directions.

As discussed above, classical liberalism has always been a major contributing factor toward development of U.S. international policies. As Henry Kissinger noted in his latest book, *Diplomacy*, "Whether fighting in World Wars or local conflicts, American leaders always claimed to be struggling in the name of principle, not interests."<sup>32</sup> In the same vein, Thomas Jefferson said, "the last hope of human liberty rests on us."<sup>33</sup> Classical liberalism has continued since Jefferson's time to influence all Presidential administrations to one degree or another in the realm of international relations. It is important to note, however, that the missionary zeal for spreading this philosophic ideal has historically been more passive than active. Indeed, for the most part, especially outside the Western hemisphere, Americans have been very content to advance the cause of democracy through rhetoric and example, not through force of arms. American liberalism as traditionally utilized for strategic engagement is therefore more succinctly characterized as non-interventionist in nature. As Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. points out, "America, unlike the Romans, the British, and the French are not colonizers of remote and exotic places" and "never developed a colonial outlook" as a means to spread American democracy abroad.<sup>34</sup> The core of U.S. liberalism is certainly a belief in universal human *liberty*, but a liberty advanced *a posteriori*, or after experience (the development of democratic institutions and practices), rather than by force.

President Woodrow Wilson was the first since Thomas Jefferson to advance the liberal concept into a broad codified version that came to be known variously as idealism, utopianism, or liberal internationalism. In 1918 he delivered a speech to the U.S. Congress outlining his famous Fourteen Points for reconstruction after World War I. Disarmament, freedom of navigation of the seas, self-determination of ethnic groups, and establishment of the League of Nations are the more prominent aspects of Wilson's codified foreign policy. By adopting and working toward these goals, he established an American traditional belief in an IR TIP that would provide what Kissinger saw as international "collective security, the conversion of one's competitors to the American way, an international system that adjudicates disputes in a legal fashion, and an unqualified support for ethnic self-determination."<sup>35</sup> Most importantly, however, the ethic of *reciprocity* between nations, no longer merely between individuals, was introduced as a guiding principle of American foreign policy and strategic thought. This ancient idea seemed to meet the rigorous threshold demanded of Immanuel Kant's well-known principle of "categorical imperative", that is, "that the only ethical activity (of government) is one that would be advantageous for humanity if it were to become a universal law practiced by all."<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the idea that individuals should treat others as they would be treated, now took on a character applicable to the conduct of nations in the international environment. American security would be enhanced by the use of collective security among nations and achieved through liberal value-based alliances. Nations that engaged in "unjust" wars of aggression would be condemned and punished by the international community as a whole. The League of Nations, conceived by Wilson, was founded upon on these ideals. At the time, American sentiments were ruled by isolationist influences and tendencies so strongly that the U.S. Congress vetoed America's entry into the League of Nations. America's ability to influence international events was thus limited without the venue of the League. Additionally, without U.S. backing it was an impotent organization, unable to check the advance toward World War II as its most powerful members, Great Britain and France, opted for a strategy of appeasement toward Hitler's Germany rather than collective security. The values and beliefs that provided the impetus for the League, however, became associated with American international politics and were indelibly woven into American political thought.

The most pragmatic and prescriptive of the competing IR TIP paradigms is classical realism which has been a major contributor to U.S. traditional approaches to international relations. Termed "power politics" by some, realism has a long theoretical pedigree and practical history in Europe and the Far East. The Monroe Doctrine was a realist approach and the basis for various American "interventionist" exploits in the 19<sup>th</sup> century although, with the

notable exception of the Philippines, exclusively in the Western hemisphere. The U.S. possessed the requisite strength necessary to consider such an IR TIP after World War II. In many respects, however, the sway of the realist camp can best be seen in the post-World War II era as it gained popularity in reaction to what many viewed as the failure of idealistic and isolationist policies to prevent war. With the advent of a powerful communist Soviet Union, realism was advocated as the best theoretical framework for advancing U.S. interests by many leading political scientists of the day. David Fromkin notes in his influential book, *The Independence of Nations*, "The realist attack on idealism in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s was led by professors, such as (E.H.) Carr in Great Britain, (Hans) Morgenthau in America and (Raymond) Aron in France."<sup>37</sup> As such, realism was the most influential IR TIP utilized by policymakers and strategists on the American political scene until the end of the Cold War.

Throughout the Cold War the central tenets of the realist tradition and practitioners guided American IR TIP with a rather heavy hand. "Balance of power", "spheres of influence", "feasibility", and "containment" became the strict cost-benefit calculus analysis by which strategy was fashioned. Many credit the shrewdness of realist policymakers with eventual success in the Cold War. Likewise, many credit realist policies with one of America's biggest strategic miss-steps—the lost war in Vietnam.<sup>38</sup> But perhaps the most compelling aspect of realism is that it forces all to the inescapable historical conclusion that strong states survive and weak states tend to dissolve, usually due to conquest. Fromkin goes on to note perhaps the most salient point relevant to the compelling nature of this theory: "Thus the first and essential condition that enables an entity to exist and participate in international politics is the possession of an adequate amount of (*strategic*) power (italics mine)."<sup>39</sup> Power thus conceived implies that a nation-state cannot exist without, *a priori*, an adequate amount of national power. As discussed before, this imparts a special status to the importance of national power for Americans. Viewed as a means and end in itself, power at once established, advanced, and ensured American democracy.

These four tenets or strategic concepts resonate in U.S. national character and are reflected, each to a differing degree at different times in history, in U.S. traditional IR TIP. All are compelling and should be included as essential tools for national security strategy development. It is equally important to note that no one traditional theory is adequate by itself in the twenty-first century. So far, partial combinations of IR TIP, like neo-conservatism, have proven imbalanced and beg the good graces of strategic flexibility and strategic reciprocity. When combined into a single quadripartite model as criteria for policy development the end result will be more supportable and appealing IR TIP for achieving U.S. national goals and

objectives. The construction of this model, and how it should be used, will be discussed later. First, however, it is necessary to briefly review the U.S. position within the context of the current strategic environment.

#### U.S. Character in the Current Strategic Environment

Over the last fifteen years America has sought to redefine its place in the world. Until 2001, the range of discussion was quite narrow, typically exalting the merits of one competing tradition over the other in meeting the uncertainty engendered by the Post-Cold War strategic environment. Thoughtful articles attempting to define the collective national security interests appeared at an almost frantic pace in all the best journals throughout the 1990s. In one of these, Francis Fukuyama hypothesized the “end of history?” as a means of relating Cold War victory to the global triumph of Kantian liberalism over other forms of government; or rather, to place his term in context, Fukuyama contended that the Hegelian dialectic process promised modernity and liberal democracy rather than communism.<sup>40</sup> Significantly, this has proven to be the most influential thought shaping our strategic direction in post-Cold War historic experience. Indeed, neo-conservatives probably identified more with the writings of Fukuyama than any other author. However this has changed significantly in recent times. Once a leading neo-conservative thinker, Fukuyama has, since 2003, written scathing criticisms of President Bush’s foreign policy, especially in regard to Iraq policy. A recent article by Robert S. Boynton, charges Fukuyama of accusing the administration of “squandering” the superior position that the U.S. found itself in after the Cold War by conducting regime change militarily in Iraq. He also notes what Fukuyama states as the mission statement of his new (2005) publication, “The American Interest”: “We’re going to analyze America’s behavior on a global stage, and the forces that shape it—not just strategic, but also economic, cultural and historical.”<sup>41</sup>

Likewise, realist political theorist John Mearsheimer predicted that we would all “soon miss the Cold War” in his 1990 article of the same title.<sup>42</sup> It was evident through this dialogue that the U.S. was a country in search of a wider mission, a peer nation, or an enemy. Liberal political commentator David Abshire very correctly summed up the character of the debate when he noted that: “In this new strategic landscape, the simple, straightforward foreign and defense policies of the last 40 years no longer apply.”<sup>43</sup> Americans had little strategic focus, as competing IR traditions were used by influential actors to attempt to fill what many considered a widening strategy and policy void.

With the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 that seemed to change as U.S. national will was galvanized toward a common objective on the international scene: destruction and

defeat of those individuals or forces responsible for the terror attacks. This development seemed to provide the missing strategic azimuth toward the future of American engagement with the rest of the world. In many respects Americans were provided a sense of direction and stability by moving toward an IR TIP in sync with the historical norm provided by World War II and the Cold War. Neo-conservatives argued that an enemy had emerged that had demonstrated its ability to threaten national security. Public vilification of al-Qaeda's terrorist tactics and extreme ideology was easy to carry out and disseminate across all spectrums of society. Needless to say the very existence of an organization determined to conduct a revolutionary Holy War against the U.S. and Western interests in general was anathema to Americans.

Determined to achieve retribution and to stamp out al-Qaeda at its roots, the U.S. launched Operation Enduring Freedom against the Taliban government of Afghanistan, and al-Qaeda terrorists whom the government harbored, in October 2001. The goals were clear and concise within the strategic environment. The "Global War on Terrorism" (GWOT) had begun unambiguously and the operation in Afghanistan was widely supported by the international community as a whole. What the world witnessed was the straightforward application of power within the context of realist IR TIP. It appeared that overwhelming military power had quickly achieved the stated aims of the Bush administration. Indeed, for practical purposes, these goals were achieved. Al-Qaeda was engaged and dispersed and the Taliban government was disbanded. Despite the fact that several key leaders of al-Qaeda, including Osama bin Laden, escaped capture, and the U.S. continues to sustain casualties in Afghanistan, the American people and the international community seemed to agree that the operation was a success.

In March 2003, the U.S. commenced "Operation Iraqi Freedom" (OIF), to rid Saddam Hussein's dictatorship of weapons of mass destruction (which were not located) and to alleviate a concern that he might provide such weapons to terrorists. A direct connection between Iraq and al-Qaeda terrorists was hard to make, but the American public trusted its leadership and were willing to defer to a wartime executive Commander-in-Chief. Whereas the United Nations Security Council had passed a resolution demanding the Taliban surrender terrorists or face a military response, the U.S. could get no such international institutional support for operations against Iraq. In a speech at the West Point Military Academy in June 2002 and in the NSS published in September 2002, President Bush both foreshadowed actions that would be taken in Iraq and outlined a new foreign policy that called for, *inter alia*, regime change and preemption of rogue states that threatened U.S. security and interests. In November 2002, the U.S. obtained a unanimous United Nations Security Council Resolution calling for the immediate

removal of weapons of mass destruction from Iraq's arsenal. As it became apparent in late 2002 and early 2003 that the U.S. was moving closer to war, support began to deteriorate internationally. By the summer of 2003, with the notable exception of Great Britain, support for U.S. foreign policy—especially in regard to the war in Iraq—had decreased by a dramatic degree.<sup>44</sup> A relatively weak “Coalition of the Willing” was formed to bolster international legitimacy. The focus of the IR TIP had shifted from straightforward application of realist military measures to achieve limited and easily justifiable goals, to an IR TIP in sync with neo-conservative aspirations for democratization in the Middle East. That is to say, somewhere between October 2001 and March 2003, the U.S. had moved from (simply) conducting a war on terror to a unique new national security strategy which would use military power, primarily, to both preempt and remove from power a potentially dangerous dictator who was perceived to threaten U.S. interests and to advance the cause of international democratization. Agreeing in principle that Fukuyama was correct in heralding the triumph of liberal democracy, neo-conservatives went a large step further by suggesting that establishing democracy in the Middle East was a central goal of the war in Iraq. To quote James Mann, “They put this military strength to work on behalf of their vision: the goal of an America whose values and ideals would prevail throughout the world because the United States was so powerful no other country could afford the costs of competing with it and no one would even begin to try.”<sup>45</sup> By combining the central tenets of liberalism (liberty) with realism (power) into a bold (some would say aggressive) IR TIP, the neo-conservatives committed the U.S. to a national security strategy that was unprecedented for the nation.

The central fault within the neo-conservative IR TIP is not that it is unprecedented, but that it is incomplete and out of balance. It only partially represents U.S. traditional approaches to national security strategy policy formulation as discussed in the previous section, and is overly reliant on the application of military power for implementation. As a result, the U.S. NSS is not easily understood by the American public and where it is understood the appeal is limited, both domestically and abroad.<sup>46</sup> American liberal aspirations on the international scene have typically been of “lead by example” nature. As discussed before, America does not have a tradition of prophesizing democratic ideals through military force projection. “Might” has never been assumed to be “Right” in the traditional liberal context and certainly not in mainstream America. Indeed, some might say that the projection of power to convert other nations into liberal democracies is antithetical to the very foundations of classical liberalism, i.e. the freedom of a sovereign nation to choose its own form of government vice a democratic hegemon imposing its will militarily. To move outside the scope of this norm conjures disturbing

similarities, in the minds of some, of the overarching political/military leanings, and ultimate demise of Ancient Athens, Imperial Rome, Napoleonic France—all republics-gone-bad.

America does not, however, have the strategic culture requisite to achieve or sustain an empire in the classical sense. Authors and scholars such as Robert Kaplan (*Imperial Grunts*, 2005), Niall Ferguson (*Colossus: The Rise and Fall of American Empire*, 2004), and Chalmers Johnson (*The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*, 2004) contend that America is, or is becoming, to one degree or another the modern equivalent of Imperial Rome, but without the culture necessary to support a classical approach to empire-building. Others like Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (*The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone*, 2003), Lawrence Korb (*A New National Security Strategy in an Age of Terrorists, Tyrants, and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Three Options*, 2003) and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (*War and the American Presidency*, 2004) argue compellingly that a republic, like the U.S., should avoid the pitfalls of imperial action. All of these writers, either intentionally or otherwise, point out that American strategic culture lacks key components for imperial status. America has never conquered territories for annexation, subjugation, or booty. Not one ounce of oil has been stolen during almost three years in Iraq; not one slave taken from Haiti, Kosovo, or Bosnia-Herzegovina; not one acre of land appropriated for colonists or favored ethnic groups. America does not have a Department of Provincial Administration. America has not installed governments which export goods or services to the American homeland free-of-charge. America has indeed employed interventionist tactics at times, military and otherwise, to establish favorable trade relations and in the long-term interest of open markets, but this is not the stuff of empires. America does have troops abroad, but they do not violate host nation laws with impunity or otherwise seek to limit or contravene the sovereign purgatives of their host-state. The United States possesses a military powerful enough to advance an imperial agenda; but the American people, which the military serves, do not have the will or the desire to create or sustain a grand empire. There have been times when American presidents have strayed into what some might call the realm of petty emperors. One example occurred under the Reagan administration's illegal program for selling arms to Iran and funneling the proceeds to the anti-communist guerrillas in Nicaragua. Other examples, though not hard to find, are not the norm for American international politics. In such cases reputations of leaders were tainted, not enhanced, and Americans interpreted it as scandal rather than justified aggrandizement. America, the land of tolerance and diversity, and freedom of choice, religion, and speech would make for a weak (therefore by definition unsustainable) colonial or imperial master.

It is interesting to note as well that according to a recent Pew survey, the Bush Administration's approval rating is at an all-time low. The poll goes on to show statistics that indicate most Americans and international observers do not believe that democracy will take hold in Iraq, most Americans believe the U.S. should be less "assertive" internationally, and that 42% of Americans believe that the U.S. should "mind its own business" internationally, the highest percentage in that category since 1975. The lists of statistics that indicate America's unease with its foreign policy are long and seem to be increasing.<sup>47</sup> If public approval is the litmus test for foreign policy success, neo-conservative policymakers would seem to have thus far miscalculated. Moreover, how does America sustain a strategy with which significant numbers of Americans apparently don't agree? Expenditure of material capital is staggering. With costs in dollars rising above \$300B for "nation-building" in Iraq, this question goes beyond intellectual agreement or disagreement with Iraq policy. There is a real cost that is being passed to generations of Americans in the form of a rising national debt. The human toll surpassed 2000 U.S. soldiers killed in action in the Fall of 2005—not an insignificant number. How many dead and wounded are Americans, who are notoriously casualty averse, willing to accept? This is a common question to which no one has a good answer. The Iraqi military and civilian death toll is more elusive; between March 2003 and December 2005, most estimates are in the range of between 28,636 to 37,589 Iraqis killed due to military actions.<sup>48</sup> It is safe to say, in any case, that with every dollar spent and life lost, the goals, objectives, and methods of the U.S. national strategy will come under more intense public scrutiny.

Americans are not the only observers who sense that U.S. foreign policy has gone astray. The current U.S. NSS is confusing abroad for those who are familiar with U.S. historical and traditional involvement on the international scene. Traditional allies are concerned about the implications of a headstrong superpower friend who appears to take no advice and shows no real concern for consensus. Erstwhile friendly weaker states, or developing states, worry about the ramifications of gun-barrel democracy, even rhetorical gun-barrel democracy, as culturally imperialistic.<sup>49</sup> The states that are not friendly to the U.S. are much less marginalized than they would have been if U.S. allies and partner states were more solidly in-step with U.S. strategic aims. To remain consistent to such a policy presents a problem as well. If democracy is good for Iraq, why isn't it good for non-democratic allies such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan? If preemptive military strikes are acceptable for the U.S., why are they not acceptable for other nations, such as Pakistan against India, Israel against Iran, China against Taiwan? Charles W. Kegley and Gregory A. Raymond argue that U.S. has indeed fostered the creation of a "permissive normative order" internationally whereby states can justify preemptive and

preventative war based on suspicion, coercion, and mistrust. They go on to assert: "How the United States acts exerts an enormous influence on the behavior of others. When the reigning hegemon promotes a new set of norms, the code of conduct changes for virtually everyone."<sup>50</sup> These questions will continue to be raised many times by those critical of American foreign policy and security strategies when looking back on this moment in time.

Unfortunate as well, there is a sense that the Iraq War has placed all the U.S. strategic eggs, as it were, in one precariously balanced basket. In other words, U.S. strategic flexibility has been limited by a perceived or real imperative for success in Iraq. If troops are withdrawn too soon, the result might well be a civil war that mushrooms into a catastrophic regional conflict. The longer troops remain, the "more blood and treasure" (a very popular phrase lately) will be expended. The U.S. is thus committed to a "long war" (likewise becoming a common term) to ensure positive outcomes and *de facto* limited in its ability to extract troops; to leave Iraq without success would severely damage the U.S. position as a leader at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, the *sine qua non* for American foreign policy and strategy is: will it succeed in advancing the strategic aims of the U.S.? The jury is still out regarding the current NSS. But many of the points already made here give one pause for thought about the inevitability of the success of neo-conservative policies at large and specifically in Iraq. The assumption that the majority of Americans support interventionist policies to create democracies because democracies tend not go to war (democratic peace theory) has little basis in U.S. tradition and does not currently enjoy much U.S. public support. But if a viable democracy was created in Iraq, or elsewhere, would it be "worth it" or explicitly in U.S. national interest? The eminent cultural historian Arnold J. Toynbee believed that liberal traditions would, eventually, supplant other forms of government. But he also warned of the difficult road to this eventuality, observing the traditional resistances to democratic influences and institutions that are entrenched in international political history.<sup>51</sup> Francis Fukuyama also reached this conclusion in his book, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 2004.<sup>52</sup> A more poignant critique of democratic peace theory is given by Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder in their new book, *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War*. In it they provide rigorous analysis to show that newly-emerging democracies are actually *more* prone to war with neighboring states. The central reason is that new democracies tend to develop democratic institutions and processes in the wrong order. Weak democratic institutions then facilitate the rise of charismatic leaders who exercise a form of democratic "tyranny of the majority", creating much more instability than authoritarian regimes or mature democracies.<sup>53</sup> If this thesis is

accurate, the process of nation-building and democracy-building in Iraq will be a long, arduous, and costly task. The best case scenario seems the prospect of a democratic Iraq fostering regional stability in the Middle East decades in the future. This will only be achievable if a new NSS is supportable and sustainable across numerous political administrations. To develop such a document it must first be based in accurate assumptions that are in sync with U.S. national character and historical IR traditions.

For these reasons it is critically important that we search for policy options and strategies that are representative of a comprehensive interpretation of unique “American internationalism”<sup>64</sup> for use in national security strategy policy development. Given the mounting pressure in both domestic and public policy realms, most would not dispute that a revision of the NSS might be a prudent part of this process. Moreover, a revision should promote a more complete conceptual framework for development of sustainable and consistent “Americanized” international strategy, rather than attempt international change for which America has little traditional precedent, historic taste, or perceived interest. With this in mind, the following pages develop the theme of America’s unique position vis-à-vis the international system of states and how that position should influence national security strategy policy formulation.

#### Toward a Quadripartite Synthesis

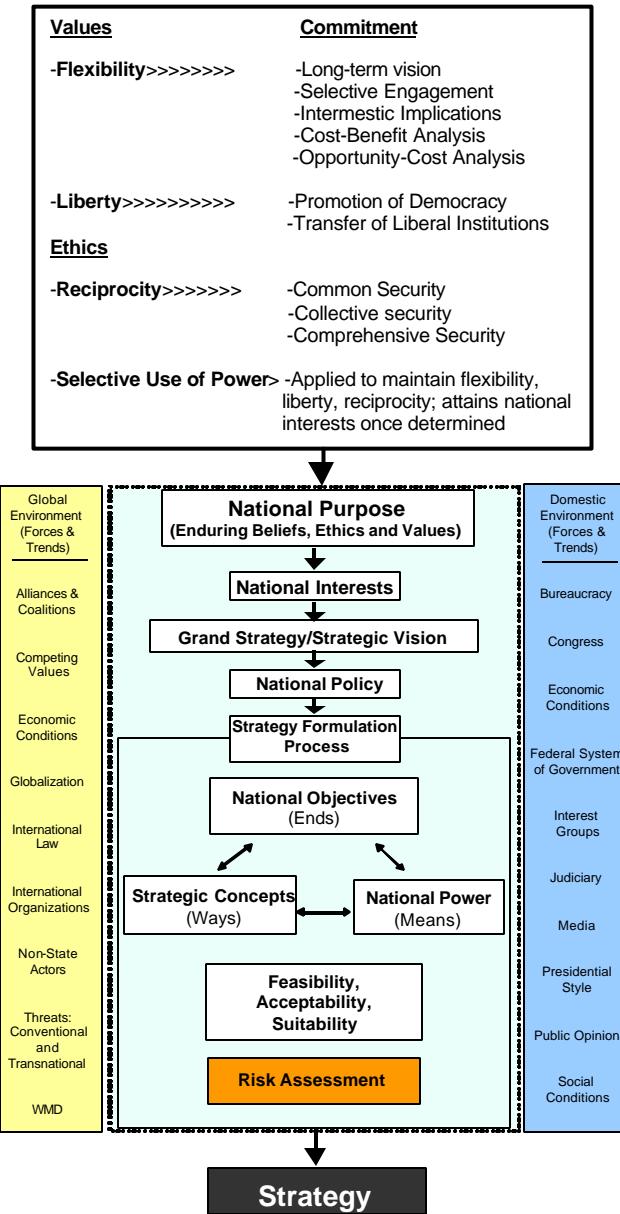
As has been demonstrated above, failure to appreciate the significance and relevance of the key elements of national character in the policy process will likely lead to faulty assumptions which will place in question the success of national policy and strategy. The cornerstones of American foreign policy include: the *ethics* of power or strength (associated with realism) and reciprocity (associated with idealism or internationalism); and the *values* of liberty (associated with liberalism) and flexibility or strategic agility (associated with neo-isolationism). These are central to U.S. national character and therefore to the creation of sustainable and successful foreign policy and national security strategy. Policymakers ignore this fact at the peril of the nation. Moreover, it should be stressed that these principles are viewed as mutually supporting and not mutually exclusive or contradictory. The nexus has been shown through an examination of U.S. collective tradition in the conduct of international relations. When viewed holistically we have a more complete picture of the fundamental components of U.S. strategic culture.

But what is the best method then to give meaningful expression to the significance of a quadripartite synthesis of these attributes? By themselves they do not present a means by which to form grand strategy or policy. Rather, they must be incorporated into a larger

framework for strategy development. The best-of-breed model that currently exists for the development of national strategy is the U.S. Army War College Strategy Formulation Model.<sup>55</sup> It provides a comprehensive and logically coherent framework and is used to teach strategic leaders at the U.S. Army War College a process for systematic policy and strategy development. With the addition of the set of national beliefs presented in this paper the direction of policy analysis will be framed and canalized at the outset of strategic decision-making toward nationally acceptable and sustainable outcomes. As such, the goal is that these attributes drive the discourse when debating U.S. national strategic interests and provide decision makers the criteria by which to evaluate competing strategic objectives in the evolving international environment.

Figure 1 shows the U.S. Army War College Strategy Formulation Model when modified to include the ethical and value-based imperatives of flexibility, liberty, reciprocity, and power (or national strength). Flexibility is associated with a long-term vision,<sup>56</sup> carefully chosen commitments, selective engagement,<sup>57</sup> and consideration of intermestic impacts on foreign policy decisions. Liberty is concerned with the extent to which strategic courses of action will advance liberal values and institutions. Reciprocity is represented by forcing an examination of the strategic opportunities to enhance common, collective, and comprehensive security,<sup>58</sup> build coalitions, support sub-regional organizations, and focus international humanitarian responses. Power, or national strength, is composed of various elements of national power: military, economic, information, and diplomatic.<sup>59</sup> National interests are determined by a comprehensive analysis of flexibility, reciprocity, and liberty within the context of the particular strategic issue under discussion. At this point a determination is made whether or not the issue under debate requires or justifies the application of any element of national power. Later in the model's cycle, the elements of national power are used to refine "grand strategy" applications of the specific elements of power toward achievement of national objectives and interests. With the exception of humanitarian issues, the application of military power should be viewed as a "last case" option and as a direct result of the necessity to ensure continued national flexibility, liberty, and reciprocity.

The quadripartite synthesis below represents the most actionable aspects of both national character and competing international relations traditions. Flexibility is essential in our turbulent world and should be factored into determining long-term strategic direction. Operationalized reciprocity is essential toward strengthening relations with ally states, assisting in the security and development of weaker nations, and in deterring aggression of state and non-state actors that are so inclined. Advancing the cause of liberty through largely



## FIGURE 1

non-interventionist means is clearly in the U.S. national interest and within U.S. capacity as the exemplar of democratic institutions and practices. And the use of national power when the retention of flexibility and maintenance of reciprocity so require will allow for the creation of gradations between competing national interests that are in sync with America's unique national inclinations and diplomatic traditions.

### Conclusion

In summary, two conclusions stand out. First, although pragmatic neo-conservatism seems to be "off the mark" in some respects it does account for several key national ingredients essential for the development of national security strategy. The leaning that can best be described as "realism" in neo-conservatism recognizes the need to actively advance U.S. interests abroad. Likewise, the tendencies toward "liberalism" in neo-conservatism, as a champion of classical liberal values, should remain a key strategic consideration. If "democratic" peace were to break-out across the globe the imperative of advancing U.S. interests would not go away and liberal values would still require U.S. stewardship. As such it is only the means by which to achieve national interests and the advancement of liberty, both a part of U.S. strategic culture, which should continue to be examined and refined. As Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. cautions in his classic, *The Imperial Presidency*, when American interests are advanced by interventionist policies emanating from liberal or realist based practices, the results might well constitute a threat to constitutional forms of government.<sup>60</sup> The best strategy, where at all possible, might then be to advance U.S. interests and the cause of liberty through non-interventionist means. Harkening back to the Powell Doctrine, when intervention *is* necessary, skilled diplomacy and economic leverage should lead the way, only followed by overwhelming military force if all other alternatives have failed.<sup>61</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., a former Assistant Secretary of Defense and the current Dean of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, reaches the same conclusion. He, as well as a growing number of others, convincingly argues that over reliance on the "hard power" of the military is a serious mistake for national security strategy-makers. Instead, the "soft power" of diplomacy, economic interaction, international action through consensus, and information sharing that wins hearts and minds should take center stage as the basis for grand strategy.<sup>62</sup>

Second, it must be noted that the relative success of the current national security strategy is as yet undetermined. President Bush's recently released *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* is a timely and well thought-out response to the specific problem sets in that region.<sup>63</sup> A revision of the current NSS is undoubtedly underway and will probably emerge in the next several

months. These efforts are essential. As a national imperative, the U.S. must conduct such reevaluation of the challenges that currently exist in the international environment. Toward this end it is instructive to use the elements of national character that shine through in the history of U.S. international relations to formulate sustainable policy and strategy. Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke have written “that the neo-conservatives have taken American international relations on an unfortunate detour, veering away from the balanced, consensus-building, and resource-husbanding approach that has characterized traditional Republican internationalism” and that the “pendulum (will) swing back” toward more traditional approaches.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps, but the pendulum must not be allowed to swing unintended as a result of failed policy. Rather, any change in national strategy must be the result of measured responses to the strategic environment within the context of the unique American system of government. An approach tempered by bridging the gap between competing IR TIP, and rounding out incomplete IR TIP as described above, might create a national security strategy more reflective of the “better angels of our nature” as Americans.<sup>65</sup>

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> George W. Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington D.C.: The White House, 17 September 2002), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), 124, 354-355.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: 1973), 452; quoted in Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Graham Evans and Jeffrey Newnham, *The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1998), 235, 362.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 360-361.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 465.

<sup>7</sup> Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia; available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical\\_liberlism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_liberlism); Internet; accessed 15 October 2005. Evans and Newnham, 304-306, go on to describe what might be termed the key pillars of classical liberal philosophy: collective security, the rule of law, securing peace through the spread of democratic institutions, and a belief in the value of interconnected free market toward sustained peace between states.

<sup>8</sup> Glen H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision-making, and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 21-22.

<sup>9</sup> James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York, New York: Viking Penguin, 2004). “Neo-conservative”, as used by Mann, describes those who believe that the U.S. should promote liberal democracy mainstays aggressively across the international spectrum based on the unique position that the U.S. enjoys as the sole superpower, i.e. the U.S. has the means to affect that end as there is no balance of power to prevent unilateral action. The underlying reason this is desirable is that 1.) Democracies will be created that share U.S. values; 2.) Democracies do not tend to start conflicts or wars; 3.) The use of military power to achieve these ends will tend to discourage the formation of peer military competitor nations. This definition shares much with democratic peace theory. Francis Fukuyama, a one-time neo-conservative stalwart, criticizes this aggressive approach as lacking legitimacy, especially in the case of Operation Iraqi Freedom. See Francis Fukuyama, “The Neo-conservative Moment.” *The National Interest* (Summer 2004), *inter alia*. Also see Marc Plattner’s work for an interesting look at American development and evolution into a unilaterally comfortable power; Marc F. Plattner, “Two Kinds of Internationalism.” *The National Interest* (Spring 2005).

<sup>10</sup> The New York Times Magazine, Francis Fukuyama, “After Neoconservatism.”, 1-7; available from <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/19/magazine/neo.html>; Internet; accessed 19 February 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>12</sup> Neil Robertson, “Leo Strauss’s Platonism.”; available from [http://www.mun.ca/animus/1999vol4/roberts4.htm#N\\_4\\_](http://www.mun.ca/animus/1999vol4/roberts4.htm#N_4_); Internet; accessed 10 November 2005. This is an interesting paper. See also; Anne Norton, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006). Professor Norton presents a controversial intellectual history of the influence of Strauss on current policy and policy makers. Of note, Francis Fukuyama takes exception to her portrayal of Strauss as an active influencer of current political trends, calling it “nonsense”. Rather, Fukuyama characterizes Strauss’s contribution as that of “a serious reader of philosophical texts who did not express opinions on contemporary politics or policy issues.”; Fukuyama, “After Neoconservatism.”

<sup>13</sup> Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia; available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo\\_Strauss](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo_Strauss); Internet; accessed 22 November 2005. Also see; James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush’s War Cabinet* (2004).

<sup>14</sup> Fukuyama, “After Neoconservatism.” 2. Fukuyama notes that the term “Jacksonian conservative” was coined by Walter Russell Mead to describe the “red-state Americans whose sons and daughters are fighting and dying in the Middle East (and) supported the Iraq war because they believed that their children were fighting to defend the United States against nuclear terrorism, not to promote democracy.”

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1962), 10, 20-21, 93-94; cited in James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., *Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey* (New York: Longman, Inc., 2001), 67. Carr’s book was first published in 1939 an arguably laid the foundations for the International Relations field of study as a formal discipline. His classic critique of “utopianism” and Wilsonian idealism not only laid the

foundation for Realism, but also set the intellectual boundaries and framework for the theories and debates which have guided relations among nations since the end of World War II.

<sup>17</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "Neo-Cons, Foreign Policy." National Public Radio, Morning Edition; available from <http://www.npr.org>; accessed 2 March 2006. An excerpt from: Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006). Fukuyama, declaring neo-conservatism irredeemable and beyond repair as a cohesive and meaningful theory, posits the construction of "Realistic Wilsonianism". This "new" combination theory would seek to "seriously" take note and respond to what "goes on inside states" and to the interconnections and mechanisms of international organizations (echoes of Joseph Nye's, *inter alia*, Functionalism).

<sup>18</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Perennial, 1988), 35. Although de Tocqueville was the first to coin the phrase, American "exceptionalism" has become almost axiomatic.

<sup>19</sup> Siobhan McEvoy-Levy, *American Exceptionalism and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, New York: Palgrave, 2001), 24. Also see; Gabriel A. Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy* (New York, Praeger, 1960).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>22</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: a Double-Edged Sword* (New York, New York: Norton, 1997), 18.

<sup>23</sup> Tocqueville, 19-154.

<sup>24</sup> John Steinbeck, *America and Americans* (New York: Viking Press, 1966), 29-34; ed. Michael Kammen, *The Contrapuntal Civilization: Essays Toward a New Understanding of the American Experience* (New York, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company).

<sup>25</sup> The Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Opinion Leaders Turn Cautious, Public Looks Homeward: America's Place in The World", 17 November 2005; available from <http://peoplepress.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=263>; Internet; accessed 20 November 2005. This survey shows the deterioration of U.S. support of the Bush administration in many areas.

<sup>26</sup> Many articles and IR theorist have posited that the American experience has shaped a unique approach to international affairs. For a recent example see James J. Hentz, eds., *The Obligation of Empire: United States' Grand Strategy for a New Century* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2004); Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (New York, New York: Norton, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Bush, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Gray, 124-128. To Gray it seems a general theory of strategy, or a unified theory of strategy, must relate directly to the preparation for or conduct of war. He views strategy as being "done" by warriors. I disagree with both of these precepts. Through the careful and

proper executive crafting of national security strategy war might be averted. In fact, following the thoughts of Sun Tzu, it would seem that the goal of good strategy would be to achieve all national objectives and avoid war if possible. In the end, it seems that Gray has terribly mixed the idea of a general theory of war with a general theory of strategy: the two are not the same in my view.

<sup>29</sup> Manifest Destiny is a phrase first used by Jacksonian Democrats in the 1840s to suggest a “divine” duty of Americans to spread their way of life. It changed character in usage somewhat as a motto that justified American expansionism into the Western frontier of North American and later in the 1890s to make a case for American involvement hemisphere-wide. Although an influential idea at various times in American history regarding America’s place in the world, it is a rather dubious historical component of American “exceptionalism”. See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifest\\_destiny](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifest_destiny) for an adequate history of the use of this phrase. The Monroe Doctrine, as the name suggests, was articulated by the Monroe administration in 1823. It argued that European powers should no longer seek influence or empire in the Western hemisphere. The U.S. would not then, as a *quid pro quo*, seek to influence European affairs. Taken as a very presumptuous policy by a relatively weak nation, the policy was scoffed at as late as the 1870s when then-Chancellor of the German Empire Otto von Bismarck remarked that the policy was an “extraordinary piece of insolence” (Evans and Newnham, 336-337).

<sup>30</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., “America and the World.” *Ethics and International Affairs* (1996): 152.

<sup>31</sup> “Intermestic”, a combination of the words international and domestic, is a term coined by Bayless Manning, a former Dean of the Stanford University Law School from 1964-71 and President of the Council on Foreign Relations. He used the expression to describe the increasing interaction between international affairs and domestic affairs. Most references in this field of study are fairly narrowly oriented toward discussing relations between the U.S. and its neighbors, Canada and Mexico, but I submit that this term now has much broader power to describe the impact of international relations on domestic politics. Isolationism and neo-isolationism have lost the ability to convey the extent to which domestic concerns require consideration when formulating international policy. Bayless Manning, “The Congress, the Executive, and Intermestic Affairs.” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 55, No. 2 (January 1977). See also: David Dunn, “Isolationism Revisited: Seven Persistent Myths in the Contemporary American Foreign Policy Debate.” *Review of International Studies* Vol. 31 (April 2005) and Evans and Newnham, 258.

<sup>32</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 810.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Jefferson quoted in Jonathan Clarke, “America, Know Thyself.” *The National Interest* (Winter 1993-94): 23.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., “The American Empire? Not So Fast.” *World Policy Journal* Vol. 22, Iss. 1 (Spring 2005): 45.

<sup>35</sup> Kissinger, 810.

<sup>36</sup> Charles W. Kegley and Gregory A. Raymond, “Global Terrorism and Military Preemption: Policy Problems and Normative Perils.” *International Politics* Vol. 41 Iss. 1 (March 2004): 37.

<sup>37</sup> David Fromkin, *The Independence of Nations* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1981), 9.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Roskin, "National Interest: From Abstraction to Strategy." *Parameters*, (Winter 1994-95): 11

<sup>39</sup> Fromkin, 23. I have added the word strategic to this quote to strengthen my presentation of the meaning of *strategic power* within the context of this paper.

<sup>40</sup> Francis Fukuyama postulated the "The End of History?" in the first and most influential 1989 article to shape the debate after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest* No.16 (Summer 1989).

<sup>41</sup> Robert S. Boyton, "The Neocon Who Isn't." *The American Prospect* Vol. 16, Iss. 10 (October 2005): 32-36. This sounds very much like a former-neoconservative revising his assumptions based on the same type of analysis that has been discussed in this paper—time will tell.

<sup>42</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War." *The Atlantic* (November 1990).

<sup>43</sup> David M. Abshire, "U.S. Global Policy: Toward an Agile Strategy." *The Washington Quarterly* (Spring 1996): 41. In this article Mr. Abshire shows that he sensed the need for an adaptive, eclectic approach.

<sup>44</sup> The Pew Global Attitudes Project, "View of a Changing World", June 2003; available from <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/185.pdf>; Internet; accessed 15 September 2005. This survey shows the deterioration of global support after the US went to war in Iraq in March 2003. As an example, Russia sentiment in support of US international policy post-Iraq war was 68%, and dropped to 24% by June of 2003.

<sup>45</sup> Mann, 358.

<sup>46</sup> The Pew Global Attitudes Project, "Opinion Leaders Turn Cautious, Public Looks Homeward: America's Place in The World".

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> The Iraq Body Count Project, Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia; available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq\\_Body\\_Count\\_project](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq_Body_Count_project) and <http://iraqbodycount.net> both present figures in a fairly similar range; as low as 28,636 and as high as 37,589 civilian/military casualties since the war began in March 2003. More reliable and precise data will hopefully be gathered in the years to come; Internet; accessed 2 March 2006.

<sup>49</sup> This is admittedly a play on words taken from the Theodore Roosevelt administration's use of the term "gunboat diplomacy". However, see Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) for the best description of American imperialism as seen through the eyes of many other nations.

<sup>50</sup> Charles W. Kegley and Gregory A. Raymond, 37.

<sup>51</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, *Change and Habit: The Challenge of Our Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 138-158.

<sup>52</sup> Boynton, 34. See also Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004). Fukuyama joins the crowd of those who believe that the “cart is put before the horse” when attempting to democratize nations with no capacity or tradition of democratic institutions or practices.

<sup>53</sup> Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War* (Boston: MIT Press, 2005), quoted in John M. Owen IV, “Iraq and the Democratic Peace: Who Says Democracies Don’t Fight?” *Foreign Affairs* (November-December, 2005): 122-127. The appearance of Mansfield’s and Snyder’s book could not have been timelier. Debate is currently raging in academic and political circles over the Middle East capacity, or lack thereof, for representative and meaningful democracy. Iraq, of course, is the case study at the center of the debate. Equally interesting (and scary) are the examples of emerging dysfunctional democracies such as the nationalist-theocracy of Iran and the populist-terrorocracy of Hamas-led Palestine. But as the columnist known as Spengler notes (Asian Times Online, “No True Scotsman Starts a War.”) the book has some problems. Mansfield and Snyder contend that America is still an “emerging democracy” in 1846 when it decides to invade Mexico. Seventy years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence is a long time to accept as the American democracy “emergent” phase. Apparently U.S. democracy matured during the intervening fifty-two years between 1846 and 1898 as they do not make this claim in reference to the Spanish-American war in 1898. They offer no counter-explanation.

<sup>54</sup> Bush, 1.

<sup>55</sup> U.S. Army War College, *Course Directive: National Security Policy and Strategy*, Academic Year 2006, Strategy Formulation Model, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Abshire, 48.

<sup>57</sup> Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 9-10, 121-171. Art’s definition of selective engagement is, “a strategy that aims to preserve America’s key alliances and its forward-based forces...assures protection of America’s vital and highly important interests... (and) steers a middle course between not doing enough and attempting too much; it takes neither an isolationist, unilateralist path at one extreme nor a world-policeman role at the other.” His book is very much in sync with the thesis of this paper, but his analysis leads to a new “Grand Strategy” while the approach of this paper is a more modest attempt to contextualize American inclinations and IR traditions and give them expression within the U.S. Army War College Strategy Formulation Model. This said, Art’s grand strategy construct might well be the best strategic “End”, whereas this paper might represent a concise ethical and value-based “Means” toward his recommended strategic direction.

<sup>58</sup> Charles W. Kegley, Jr., “The New Global Order.” *Ethics and International Relations* Vol. 6 (1992): 31; Kegley defines common security as “that which proceeds from the conviction that disputants have an interest in reducing their adversary’s insecurity”; comprehensive security as that which “stresses how the economic, political, and military dimensions of security intersect with one another”; and collective security as “fostering community responsibilities to mount a collective response to the aggression of any actor against another”.

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Army War College, Strategy Formulation Model.

<sup>60</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973).

<sup>61</sup> Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia; available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Powell Doctrine>; Internet; accessed 12 December 2005. See also; Colin Powell, with Joseph Persico, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House, 1996).

<sup>62</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). This is not Nye's strongest work on the subject, but is very concise, readable, and drives home the point that soft power is a much neglected facet of our national power. Nye could have made a stronger case for the use of NGOs, PVOs, and MNCs as tools of soft power.

<sup>63</sup> George W. Bush, *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* (Washington D.C.: The White House, November 2005).

<sup>64</sup> Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-conservatives and the Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 7, 9; quoted in Theo Farrell, "Strategic Culture and American Empire." *The SAIS Review of International Affairs* Vol. XXV, No. 2 (Summer-Fall 2005): 13.

<sup>65</sup> Abraham Lincoln was quoted quite infrequently on IR issues as he had more pressing domestic issues at hand for the majority of his presidency, but he was accused at times of "stumbling along" in foreign policy, to which he quipped that "it had on the whole stumbled along in the right direction." The current U.S. administration will never be accused of stumbling along, but may well be criticized in the future on the direction it chose to take. Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years* (New York, New York: Charles Scribner's, 1939, Volume 3), 284.

